



City of Seattle
Mike McGinn, Mayor

BRIEFING MEMO

To: Seattle City Council
From: Max Miner, Loey May Engel, Tiffany Do, Sarah Servin
Policy Aide: Marci Curtin
Subject: Youth Homelessness
Date: Thursday, March 25, 2010

Purpose

The purpose of our policy proposal is to resolve conflicts between youth and their parents or guardians, thus preventing them from becoming homeless and needing shelter or other services.

Summary

- Contract services for over-the-phone-consultation for Seattle youth at-risk of becoming homeless
- Expansion of Cocoon House Project SAFE preventive service model
- Youth Care Teen Shelter outreach and referral partnership

Background

The issue of youth homelessness came up frequently in the five youth community meetings held by the Seattle Youth Commission this past fall, motivating us to form a youth homelessness policy group. In our outreach process we visited three of the four teen shelters in King and Snohomish County: Friends of Youth in Kenmore, YouthCare in the University District and Project SAFE/Cocoon House in Everett. At the Friends of Youth boy's shelter in Kenmore we met with a therapist for homeless youth who spoke of how, in many situations, the entire family is unhealthy and the child commonly gets blamed for conflict when, in fact, much of the problem originates from the parents' own issues. Family reunification and conflict resolution are key in keeping young adults off the street and in a safe and nurturing family environment.

Homelessness is a grim reality facing over 1,900 King County youth/young adults every day and night (Street Youth Task Force Barriers to Shelter Study Pilot Project Needs Assessment). Family issues are commonly identified by unaccompanied homeless youth as a primary reason for their homelessness (National Alliance to End Homelessness). Services that improve family functioning and prevent or stop the conflict that leads to runaway or throwaway scenarios are vital to preventing youth homelessness. A program that aims to keep the child safely in the home and out of a shelter is not only the most effective way to prevent youth homelessness

but also saves money by reducing the number of homeless youth that rely on government-funded shelters or other services.

The City of Seattle is currently a significant partner in the Committee to End Homelessness in King County. In addition, the city's Seattle Youth and Family Initiative strives to provide support services to youth from birth to adulthood. Our proposal prevents youth homelessness and fulfills the initiative by providing needed services to families and youth and by helping to ensure a peaceful home environment. We propose that the city of Seattle contract with the nationally known teen homeless prevention program Cocoon House Project SAFE.

Cocoon House Project SAFE

Cocoon House Project SAFE provides a confidential 90-minute over-the-phone consultation between a master's level therapist and the parent or guardian of an at-risk youth. In Everett in 2009, Cocoon House Project SAFE provided support, education, and training to 524 parents of high-risk teens, up from 386 in 2008 (Cocoon House Annual Report). In cases where parents were asked to phone in and set up a counseling session before signing their child into the shelter, Cocoon House Project SAFE had a 90% success rate in resolving conflict in the home to the point that shelter services were not needed and the youth could remain at home. Two months after the over-the-phone therapy session 85% of parents stated that the situation at home had improved.

Prevention services provided by Cocoon Project SAFE are a fundamental part of an effective homelessness prevention policy. The National Alliance to End Homelessness cites Cocoon House Project SAFE as a best practice in teen homeless prevention and featured Cocoon House Project SAFE in the Toolkit for Ending Homelessness report. The National Alliance 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act-Guide to Community Planners and Youth Advocates included Cocoon Project SAFE as an example model program for prevention of unaccompanied homeless youth.

Recommendation

We recommend that the City of Seattle contract with Cocoon House Project SAFE to provide this 90-minute over-the-phone consultation service to Seattle's homeless youth.

Implementation

To assure quality care and community involvement, YouthCare's teen shelter has agreed to be the Seattle location that would coordinate with Cocoon House Project SAFE, referring families of at-risk youth to the help line and keeping statistics on the number of families served. This will also help ensure that the efforts of Cocoon House Project SAFE are coordinated with the best interests of the youth and family.

Budget Summary

Contracting with Cocoon House would cost approximately \$41,200 to provide counseling services to 50-60 families, which is quite low compared to the approximately \$200,000 that would be needed to begin a entirely new program in Seattle. Once a teen has become homeless, it can be extremely difficult if not impossible for case managers to re-initiate a long-term connection between the youth and their parents. Placing one individual in yearlong transitional

housing is extremely expensive for both the city and the state, especially when compared with the ~\$800 per family cost of Cocoon house Project SAFE. If contracting out with Cocoon House Project SAFE proves successful, the City could hypothetically begin a similar, larger-scale program based here in Seattle. (Full budget is attached).

RSJI Implications

Contracting with Cocoon House Project SAFE also helps meet the goals of Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative. According to a 2009 study at the University of California, San Diego, homeless youth of color tend to access service much differently than white youth. Youth of color are less likely to access services that were obviously for homeless youth due to a desire to appear stable and more frequently reported that they had recently had contact with their families. Cocoon House Project SAFE is a nonintrusive, non-stigmatizing, confidential way to receive services that can help keep a youth from becoming homelessness or stop the cycle of homelessness. This program can either eliminate or shorten a youth's time on the street and therefore drastically decreases their chances of being exploited sexually or for other criminal acts, becoming victims of violent crime or facing the permanent mental and physical damages associated with living on the street.

Outreach

The key to making Cocoon House Project SAFE successful in Seattle would be effective outreach. The city would need to put up informational notices in places likely to be frequently visited by at-risk youth and/or their parents. Places such as high schools, counseling offices, health clinics, homeless youth service centers, therapist offices and community centers would be essential in spreading the word about the services provided by Cocoon House Project SAFE. In addition, the program would ensure the 211 Community Information Line had up to date program information for referral.

Legislation:

All legislative implications would be incorporated in the upcoming budget cycle.